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### Psychological distress in caregivers to terminally ill patients in a nation-wide population-based study. What is the role of pre-loss grief symptoms?

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**Background:** Psychological distress in caregiver to terminally ill patients has been associated with complicated grief and depressive symptoms. The role of severe grief symptoms during caregiving has been sparsely investigated. We aimed to explore caregivers' grief symptoms and analyse the associations with socio-demographic factors, psychological distress and situational factors in palliative caregiving.

**Method:** We conducted a population-based prospective study of caregivers to patients registered with drug reimbursement due to terminal illness. In total, 3,113 caregivers completed a pre-loss version of the PG-13 scale measuring grief symptoms. Associations with socio-economic factors, depressive symptoms (BDI-II), caregiver burden (BSFC), preparedness for death, communication about dying (CCID) and information about prognosis were analysed using logistic regression.

**Results:** Severe pre-loss grief symptoms were reported by 487 caregivers (15.6%). These symptoms were associated with depressive symptoms (adj. OR=12.4, 95% CI: 9.8-15.7), high caregiver burden (adj. OR=8.4, 95% CI: 6.5-10.8), low preparedness for death (adj. OR=2.9, 95% CI: 2.3-3.7), low communication about dying (adj. OR=3.3, 95% CI: 2.5-4.5) and perception of the information of the prognosis as inadequate. Spousal relation (adj. OR=2.6, 95% CI: 2.0-3.4) and low education (adj. OR=1.8, 95% CI: 1.3-2.4) were socio-economic factors associated with severe pre-loss grief symptoms.

**Conclusions:** Severe pre-loss grief symptoms were associated with situational factors in palliative care, depressive symptoms, spousal relation and low educational level. These factors seem to interplay in a complex process. Attention towards severe pre-loss grief symptoms in caregivers to terminally ill patients is needed to support these caregivers.